

SACRED HEART CHURCH  
AT WHITEMARSH  
16101 Annapolis Road  
Bowie  
Prince Georges County  
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-1014

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SACRED HEART CHURCH AT WHITEMARSH

HABS NO. MD-1014

Location: 16101 Annapolis Road, Bowie, Prince George's County, Maryland

Significance: This is the only pre-Revolutionary War Roman Catholic Church in the county, and the site of important events in the development of the Catholic Church in Maryland.

Description: Sacred Heart Church is a stone, three-bay-by-four-bay, gable-roofed structure with an earlier, semi-octagonal sanctuary to the rear, and a later wooden bell tower to the front. The main block is of random ashlar stone (dressed at the front only) with quoining. The windows are one-over-one-light sash with a fixed light above, and have dressed, pointed-arch, stone lintels. The low-pitched, gable-front roof overhangs, supported by decorative scrolled brackets against a dentiled cornice.

At the front entry is a wooden vestibule and bell tower, with an open bell cote. The tower is wood frame, covered with vinyl siding. There is a pointed-arch entry to either side and a fixed, stained-glass window to the front. At the second story of the tower, at each elevation, is a round window with a five-point-star pattern. The open bell cote has a turned balustrade with pointed-arch supports between the corner posts. It has a pyramidal roof with a cross atop it, and a bracketed cornice.

The sanctuary to the rear, the oldest section, is two bays wide with a semi-octagonal bay at the west end. The structure is of dressed, coursed ashlar stone, with a water table, and belt course at the level of the window sill. The windows are six-over-six-light-sash with three fixed lights in the rounded arch above, with stone quoining along the top and sides. As with the main block, the roof overhangs, with a dentiled cornice and brackets.

History: The land on which Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church sits was used as the site of the Mission of St. Francis Borgia by the Jesuits

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as early as the 1720s. The tract of land, known as Carrollsburgh, belonged to James Carroll, and was bequeathed to the church upon his death. However, with the establishment of the Church of England in Maryland in 1692, it became illegal for the Catholic church to hold property. Therefore, Carroll's bequest was made to three members of the Jesuit clergy. As tax-paying priests, they could maintain a private chapel on private property. Sacred Heart thus provided for Catholic worship in this manner until 1793, when an act establishing rights to securing property for the support of the Catholic church legitimized its existence.

The stone chapel--the current sanctuary--was constructed ca. 1741, of local sandstone. It was here, in 1783, that the first meeting of the clergy was held for the purpose of forming a plan of organization for the Catholic Church in America. This meeting was headed by John Carroll of Upper Marlboro, who a year later was appointed "Head of the Missions in the provinces of the New Republic of the United States of North America." In another landmark meeting held at Sacred Heart in May of 1789, John Carroll was nominated Bishop. Thus, in 1790, Carroll became the first Catholic Bishop in America, and would later become Archbishop. John Carroll was also known as the founder of Georgetown University.

In addition to the chapel and rectory, the property included farmlands, the proceeds of which were used to support the clergy. The Federal Direct Tax of 1798 lists the property as including, in addition to the chapel, a hip-roof dwelling, kitchen and cornhouse, six negro houses, barn, stable, meat house, poultry house, nine tobacco houses and a tenant house with a kitchen. The current nave was added, converting the chapel into a sanctuary or sacristy, in the 1820s. An 1832 description of the property in a letter written by the resident priest describes the chapel as a "...fine church of stone, 95 by 35 feet." In addition, there were "frame buildings for twenty novices and two Missioners, with two spare rooms for guests; kitchen, refectory, stable..." (Cited in a

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letter from Father Fedelis Grivel to Father Nicholas Sewell, 30 May 1932; quoted in "A Monograph on the Foundation and Development of Old Sacred Heart Church.." cf note #3).

A fire in May of 1853 completely destroyed the novitiate (listed as frame building for twenty novices) and gutted the church, leaving only the stone walls standing (Cited in Planter Advocate, 18 May 1853). It was rebuilt in 1855, according to an inscription over the east entryway. The frame vestibule and bell tower were added in 1876. Later renovations occurred in 1916 and 1972. A new church building was erected in 1969 to accommodate the growing population of Bowie.

Sources:

Pearl, Susan G. National Register of Historic Places, nomination-inventory form, Old Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church (Whitemarsh), prepared October 1987.

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County; a Pictorial History, Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Publishing Co., 1984.

Historian:

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